

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 851

C O N F H O D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1082

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: SRI LANKA OPPOSITION STEPS UP ANTI-GOVT CAMPAIGN

1. OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK ITS INTENTION TO HOLD 150 "PROPAGANDA MEETINGS" ALL OVER SRI LANKA ON APRIL 21, GIVING RISE TO MAJOR CASE OF JITTERS WITHIN MRS BANDARANAIKE'S GOVERNMENT. UNP MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED FOR EACH ELECTORATE AND REPRESENT LATEST PHASE OF MONTHS-OLD AGITATION CAMPAIGN TO RALLY PUBLIC SUPPORT AND TO MODERATE LEFTWARD TREND OF GSL DOMESTIC POLICY. OPPOSITION LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE DENIES ALL TALK THAT UNP WILL RESORT TO VIOLENCE. PRIME MINISTER AND UNITED FRONT (UF) PARTIES APPARENTLY HAVE MAJOR DOUBTS, HOWEVER, AND POLICE AND MILITARY WERE PLACED ON FULL ALERT APRIL 18. PRIME MINISTER IS ALSO HOLDING SPECIAL POLITICAL MEETING APRIL 19 WITH GOVERNMENT PARLIAMENTARY GROUP OF PRO-UF MP'S TO DISCUSS "IMPORTANT MATTERS", WHICH WILL REPORTEDLY INCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF BANNING APRIL 21 UNP RALLIES. EARLIER, PM HELD MEETING WITH GAZETTED POLICE OFFICERS APRIL 12 AND ADDRESSED ARMY PERSONNEL AT PANAGODA AND MILITARY COMMANDERS AND SEVERAL HUNDRED OFFICERS AT BANDARANAIKE HALL ON APRIL 18, ALL IN ORDER TO ENLIST THEIR COOPERATION AND "VIGILANCE" AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO CREATE DISORDER. DURING PAST WEEK, CONFIDENTIAL

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PRO-GOVERNMENT PRESS HAS GONE ALL OUT IN DENOUNCING UNP'S "FASCIST"

TACTICS AND HAS GIVEN DAILY FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO POLEMICAL ASSURANCES

OF LOYALTY AND SUPPORT FROM PRO-UF TRADE UNIONS.

2. OUR UNP SOURCES DISCLAIM ANY INTENTION OF PROVOKING CONFRONTATION OR SHOWDOWN WITH UFG. THEY SAY THAT IF APRIL 21 RALLIES ARE BANNED, LIKELY RESPONSE WOULD AT MOST BE SCATTERED "TOKEN" MEETINGS, BUT THAT PLANS WILL IN ANY EVENT GO FORWARD TO ORGANIZE SPECIFIC CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MEASURES BEGINNING MAY 1.

3. BRAWLS AT RECENT POLITICAL MEETINGS, UNP'S PERSISTENT CALL FOR 1975 ELECTIONS, AND GSL'S CONCERN OVER APPARENT INCREASING PUBLIC RESPONSIVENESS TO OPPOSITION APPEALS HAVE LED MRS. BANDARANAIKE TO CONCLUDE THAT SITUATION IS VOLATILE. HER UNEXPECTEDLY HARD AND NERVOUS

LINE AT PRESENT TIME HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY RADICAL

"JANAVEGAYA" GROUP AND, TO LESSER EXTENT, BY TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP). BOTH FACTIONS ARE SAID TO BE ARGUING THAT UNP IS OUT TO "TOPPLE" GOVERNMENT BY CAPITALIZING ON ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES

AND THAT PUBLIC MEETINGS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TACTICS ARE CALCULATED

TO FORMENT INITIAL ROUND OF DISORDERS.

4. COMMENT: PRIME MINISTER APPEARS TO BE PULLING OUT ALL STOPS AGAINST UNP APRIL 21 MEETINGS, EVEN THOUGH THEY DO NOT SEEM TO US TO PRESENT IMMEDIATE THREAT TO HER GOVERNMENT. HER ATTITUDE INDICATES MORE RADICAL LEFTISTS MAY HAVE PREVAILING INFLUENCE OVER PRIME MINISTER'S ACTIONS IN CURRENT SITUATION.
VAN HOLLEN

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